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Follow-up to the World Summit for Social Development

Statement submitted by the International Federation of Business and Professional Women, the International Federation of Settlements and Neighbourhood Centres, Soroptimist International and Zonta International (general) non-governmental organizations in general consultative status with the Economic and Social Council; the International Council of Jewish Women, the International Council of Psychologists, the International Federation of Social Workers, the International Federation of University Women, the Maryknoll Fathers and Brothers, Perhaps Kids Meeting Kids Can Make a Difference, School Sisters of Notre Dame; the Society for the Psychological Study of Social Issues, the World Association of Girl Guides and Girl Scouts, non-governmental organizations in special consultative status with the Council; and the Armenian Relief Society, the Association for Childhood Education International and the International Women's Anthropology Conference, non-governmental organizations on the Roster of the Council

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31 of 25 July 1996.

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00-27982 (E) 080200

CHILDREN'S RIGHT TO EDUCATION
A FOCUS THEME FOR FURTHER IMPLEMENTATION OF THE SOCIAL SUMMIT

As advocates for children's rights, Non-Governmental Organizations welcomed the World Summit for Social Development (WSSD) and embraced its Programme of Action in which participating States commit themselves to promote and attain universal and equitable access to quality education to help eradicate poverty, promote employment and foster social integration, with a particular emphasis on girls' education. But later, when the goals of the Summit were not supported by concrete agreements within countries, among countries and intergovernmental and international institutions, the goals became more a series of unfulfilled ideals.

However, the WSSD created a momentum within the international community to reflect on and mobilize political will for social development. The occasion of the Summit follow-up lends itself to translate these ideals into concrete actions and goals. They should include re-consideration of national priorities, especially where the proportion of the national budget allocated to defense far exceeds that allocated for health and education taken together (1999 UNICEF Report). They should also include new and concrete forms of international cooperation, especially those related to the relief or cancellation of the external debt of poor countries.

At the same time the implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) depends greatly on the implementation of the overall goals of the WSSD. However, worrisome trends that globalization brings, especially to vulnerable populations (ever more excluded from human development and access to technology and information), call for a more strategic focus on the Summit's implementation.

Education: A Key Goal

Among the positive outcomes of the WSSD was the reaffirmed consensus that education is a key goal for social development, in accordance with long standing UN goals, principles and international treaties. At the Summit, education was conceptualized not only as a basic human right but also as an essential element for a nation's development. Education's link to all aspects of human life makes it indispensable to enable an environment for poverty eradication, expansion of productive employment and social integration, and respect for and protection of human rights.

In the WSSD Programme of Action, the goal of universal primary education in all countries before the year 2015 confronts UNICEF data for 1999 that there are "about 130 million primary school age children in developing countries who do not attend school." Therefore, this goal becomes even more essential.

The 1999 UNICEF report also indicates that in the least developed countries, "approximately 73 million of the 130 million out-of-school children" are girls. This indicates that to close the gender gap by 2005 these countries will need special assistance. Attaining quality education seems even more difficult to achieve, given many countries' critical economic conditions. The debt crisis has to be addressed ethically and realistically. The Social Summit goals are unattainable if poor national economies have to dedicate one third or more of their budgetary resources to their external debt service.

Basic Agreements on Education:

In the design and implementation of new projects and programs for education, the Convention on the Rights of the Child must be the guiding framework, with special attention to the following basic principles:

- Education adhering to the principles of the United Nations and preparing children for development, and a culture of human rights and peace.
- Quality education that maintains training of teachers and adequate material resources, and provides life skills, improves health and nutrition and builds self-esteem.
- Elimination of gender and social inequalities, with affirmative action for the education of girls, children with disabilities, indigenous children, working and displaced children.
- Budgetary priority for obligatory primary education.
- The inclusion of pre-school in free primary education as an option for families.

National Political Framework on Education:

New international agreements on education may include the implementation of national educational systems to ensure the above basic principles, foster social integration and eliminate social stratification through a political framework that:

- Makes governments responsible and accountable for primary, public, free and universal education.
- Subsidizes poor communities (from federal or state resources) to achieve a standard of high quality education for all.
- Takes into consideration the special needs of vulnerable groups, including migrant, refugee and internally displaced children.
- Considers advances and good practices in the formulation of their programs on education.

INTERNATIONAL AND NATIONAL RESOURCES FOR EDUCATION

If the goal of education for all is to be achieved, additional financial resources are indispensable. We see the following as possible:

Debt cancellation in exchange for education:
The poor did not contract the external debt but de facto pay the consequences of their countries' indebtedness. While the cancellation or alleviation of these debts are crucial for social evelopment, there is no guarantee that such measures will automatically bring new resources to eradicate poverty and to attain the basic needs of national populations. Therefore, accords must be made to include specific percentages of canceled debt to be invested in education.

Support for Education from the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund.
The appeal to these two financial institutions to rethink their policies in relation to national economies has to take into consideration that the peace and well-being of nations crucially depends on the eradication of poverty and its many expressions. Positive macro-economic indicators do not express people's well-being. Their social needs have to be introduced in the WB and IMF assessments of a country. It is necessary for the Bretton

Woods institutions to be key partners in the implementations of the Social Summit goals on education. Assistance to developing countries should always include grants for education.

20/20 Initiative:
An evaluation of the implementation of the 20/20 initiative in relation to the Social Summit goals should inform new bilateral agreements between developed and developing countries investing in specific areas of education.

Official Development Assistance (ODA):
ODA should largely be directed to social development. Agreements on concrete percentages of all ODA for education and other basic services are indispensable. Developed countries that have not reached the 0.07 point agreement are in the best position to fulfill their commitment with new funds for education.

Social Corporate Responsibilities:
Companies operating in poor countries bear a special responsibility for their host countries' citizens. Commercial and financial enterprises are showing signs of supporting partnerships with public and private entities to implement social programs. Concrete educational projects can be readily financed by corporations in collaboration with governments and civil society.

Good Governance Practices:
Accountability and transparency are prerequisites for good governance and should be expressed not only in agreements but also in the program designs and evaluations. Good governance will shift substantial resources to basic social services. Agreements on international cooperation for social development must include assistance to improve governance practices.

Reallocation of Military Budgets:
The old appeal to reallocate military budgets to basic human needs, reaffirmed at the Social Summit, is still an issue that needs to be brought back in relation to shift resources to social development. Some re-allocations can be easily accomplished by the military performing social services, i.e. building schools. Military budgets higher than the budgets for health and education combined do not have ethical justification.